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The Pre-Romantic Drama of Spain, an Introductory Study

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THE DRAMA OF PRE-ROMANTIC SPAIN

I

THE thirty-three years immediately preceding the advent of Romanticism in Spain were but a continuation of that so-called decadence which had fallen upon Spanish literature with the end of the Golden Age. During the extensive period covered by this decadence, there were two prominent phases in the drama, the national and the neo-classic. One was traditional, the other, an importation.

The neo-classic movement cannot be called a revival; it was little more than a long continued attempt at a revival, which, although the purpose of its champions was on the whole lofty, failed in the end because of very definite reasons—the qualities inherent in classicism, on the one hand, and those that make up the Spanish genius, on the other.

The eighteenth century did not lack in men of genius and ability. Had José de Cañizares and Antonio de Zamora lived and written under the happier influences of Lope's day, with little doubt they would now rank among the brighter lights of the *siglo de oro*. The broad intellectuality of Feijoó and Luzán can hardly be questioned; Jovellanos would be outstanding in any age, as would the Moratíns, Padre Isla, García de la Huerta, Cadalso, Meléndez Valdés, and Quintana, to say nothing of that remarkable and original genius, Ramón de la Cruz. These men and numerous colleagues proclaim the fact that the age was not devoid of men of ability. The causes for the general low state of Spanish literature must be sought elsewhere. The comprehensive explanation, when it is made, will take into consideration not only the political and social influences, but will analyze the spiritual and intellectual composition of the Spanish mind at this time. Here we shall be content with mentioning two great literary faults as among the prime factors, overimitation and lack of an artistic ideal.

The Spanish dramatists of the early eighteenth century were given to imitating the masters who had preceded them. Without keeping for themselves a standard of perfection, they sought to do little more than please an undiscriminating public (a defect of the nationalistic group until well into the next century). When at last sane heads began to cast about in search of a purge for this state of affairs, they looked upon Italy and, especially, France, where they saw a drama flourishing under the Aristotelian rules. Here, they decided, was what their country lacked. And so Spain was offered, through the *Poética* of Luzán, an artistic ideal, but a foreign one and one which demanded further imitation.

What the Spanish genius needed was an ideal suited to its own temper and free from imitation. Yet many earnest minds thought they saw salvation in the classical concepts, which were at first given a timid support that later became more generous, though they never found universal and wholehearted acceptance with either critics or public.

From the date of the *Poética*, 1737, neo-classicism in Spain moved strugglingly forward to reach its period of greatest achievement in the years between 1800 and the sudden appearance of Romanticism, when it was definitely throttled. During

the eighteenth century it had carried in its slow wake a large percentage of the writers whose names figure in the literature of that age. By 1800 we find two definite, opposing "schools" of drama; but we find further that neo-classicism is almost at the point of taking a place in the theater along with that held by traditionalism, which it achieves definitely in the years 1805 and 1806, with Quintana's *Pelayo* and Moratín's *El sí de las niñas*. And from this time on the neo-classic drama is in the ascendent in Spain with both critics and public, while the national drama is at perhaps the lowest ebb of its history as regards quality, though its output continues to be enormous.

Out of the chaos of the preceding century had appeared as a moderator the so-called, but ill-defined, Salamancan School, whose purpose was to avoid the extravagances of both the nationalists and the neo-classicists. Among the later members of this group was Manuel José Quintana, a disciple of Meléndez Valdés and Cienfuegos. His chief importance in a study of the drama of this time is that he, more than any other after Luzán, gave clear expression to the dramatic ideals of the members of the French school. This he did in an opuscule, a didactic poem published in 1791 with the title *Las reglas del drama*. Unlike its parent, the *Art poétique* of Boileau, it never, in any sense of the word, served as a manifesto for the exponents of classicism, but did, nevertheless, set forth their concepts in a very precise manner; so that, by a study of it, one can come into a fairly exact knowledge of what drama meant to them and what they tried to do for the drama of their day. Its chief value is that it states clearly the attitude held by the dramatists of the French school, who were flourishing more than ever, and who were at the beginning of the century about to rival on the stage the nationalistic group. The latter had thus far held the upper hand and were yielding any prestige only with a bitter struggle.

To the active Spanish stage Quintana himself contributed but two plays, *El Duque de Viseo* and *Pelayo*. The former was imitated from a blood-and-thunder play of the English theater, *The Castle Spectre* of Matthew Gregory Lewis. Developed under classical rules, it was presented on the evening of May 19, 1801, only to be withdrawn under unfavorable criticism after a single performance.[1]

Infinitely more successful was the *Pelayo*, played for the first time in the Coliseo de los Caños del Peral on the 19th of January, 1805. The triumph of this piece was immediate and lasting; it figured in the active theatrical repertory of Spain for nearly fifty years, and the popularity of its appeal is still echoed whenever some Spanish critic takes it upon himself to comment upon the play. More strictly classic than the *Duque de Viseo*, its success may be attributed in part to the tremendous patriotic appeal it had for the Spaniards, who were beginning to feel and resent the harsh hand of foreign oppression. The theme it employed and its fiery and ardent speeches, declaimed heroically from the stage by Isidoro Máiquez, went deep into the Spanish soul, causing public and critics alike to forget its classic form.

The success of *Pelayo* meant much for the subsequent neo-classic efforts in the drama and helped to pave the way for Moratín's *El sí de las niñas*, a play without patriotic appeal. The presentation of this play in 1806 was an important event in the history of the contemporary theater, because its success meant that neo-classic drama, without having to rely upon an appeal to patriotism, had at last found a place on the stage of Spain. The success of the piece was extraordinary; it ran for twenty-six consecutive days, until interrupted by Lent; the author enjoyed an indisputable popularity, the defeat of his adversaries was complete, much of the hostility that had

[1] Years later, however, it re-entered the repertory of the Spanish theater, to hold a definite place over a period of years.

long existed against him was dispelled, and he was hailed by the press of the capita and of the provinces. Nevertheless, Moratín's antagonists were not quieted, and, envious of their rival's victory, they had recourse to an insidious extreme and denounced him to the Inquisition. Disappointed and embittered, Moratín resolved never again to write for the theater, abandoning the plans he had already developed for several other comedies.

Let us state again the significance of *El sí de las niñas*. By 1806 the national theater was nearly as popular as ever; there was not yet a majority of sentiment favoring classic methods and form. Its hearty acceptance was then, and has since been considered, a significant victory for the Gallo-classicists and a defeat for the nationalists. However, this triumph did not signalize the death of the very decadent national school or the unreserved acceptance of the classic rules to the exclusion of laxity and freedom in dramatic construction and development. It meant chiefly that drama built according to the requirements of classicism had achieved recognition.

II

The writers of tragedy during the pre-Romantic period have been called *Quintanistas* and the writers of comedy, *Moratinistas*. These are rather arbitrary terms, but they serve broadly to group the exponents of these two types of drama.

Among the early *Quintanistas* were many dramatists whose plays either met with the same unfavorable receptions as those accorded the dramatic efforts of the earlier Gallo-classicists or achieved only a modicum of success. María Rosa Gálvez de Cabrera was an imitator of Quintana in verse and was the authoress of many dramas in the classic manner. Her tragedies are the best of her works, and among them the most prominent are *Ali-Bek* (1801), *Blanca de Rossi* (1804), and *Florinda* (1804). Contemporary with her was Francisco Sánchez Barbero, a poor poet and a worse dramatist, whose *Coriolano* (1803) was not played until five years after its composition and then was withdrawn after three days under a storm of ridicule. His tragic melodrama *Saul* (1805), adapted from Alfieri, was played with considerable success at the Caños del Peral. Better than Sánchez Barbero as a poet, though whatever fame he enjoyed rested chiefly upon his nautical writings, was José Vargas y Ponce, who wrote a single tragedy, *Abdalaziz y Egilona* (1804), a wild and extravagant piece which drew a smart reproof from the author's friend, Jovellanos.

Head and shoulders above most of his contemporaries as a literary artist was Dionisio Solís, a modest and retiring writer who gave his best efforts for more than a quarter of a century to translating from foreign theaters. His two tragedies, *Tello de Neira* and *Blanca de Borbón*, are the best of his original work. Neither was ever played, however, although the author had planned to produce the latter piece. But on learning that his friend Gil y Zárate had composed one on the same theme, Solís generously insisted that his friend's piece be staged, keeping the fact of his own a secret. The comedies of Solís, four in number, were, like his tragedies, built according to classical requirements. Hartzenbusch asserts, however, that the tragedies are very superior to the comedies.[2] Solís' greatest contribution to the Spanish drama was not made as a creative writer, but as a translator, of which more will be said below.

The so-called Sevillian school of writers added very little to the repertory of the theater. Alberto Lista was the author of one original play, a tragedy, *San Justo y Rufina*.[3] His other contributions to Spanish drama were four translations from the

[2] *Biblioteca de autores españoles*, LXVII, 236.

[3] Another tragedy, *Armida y Reinaldo*, was never completed.

French. Another writer often identified with this school, though wrongly so, was José Marchena. A Francophile of the first order, his spirit so absorbed the essence of the genius of France that he all but lost his intellectual identity as a Spaniard. He was the least Spanish of all the *afrancesados*. The spiritual evolution he underwent in France enabled him to write what comes near to being the best tragedy of Spanish neo-classicism, *Polixena* (1808), his only original drama, which, a nineteenth century writer and critic says, is worthy to stand at the side of García de la Huerta's *Raquel*, López de Ayala's *Numancia*, Quintana's *Pelayo* and the *Edipo* of Martínez de la Rosa.[4] *Polixena* differs from the first three of these in that it has nothing Spanish about it; it does not go to Spanish legend or history and not once does it evince any of that *españolismo* which so marks these dramas. It is more classic than any other play of the pre-Romantic period before *Edipo*. The piece was never played, however, and what favor it might have had with the public of its day, one can only conjecture.

The best native tragedy produced during this period was the *Edipo* of Martínez de la Rosa. Like Marchena, the author of *Edipo* wrote his play after spending several years among the French, where he imbibed enough of their spirit to enable him to write the most important tragedy of Spanish neo-classicism. His earlier efforts in this genre, *La viuda de Padilla* (1812) and *Morayma* (1818), are not to be compared with his last. Close contact with the genius of France seemed to be necessary for a Spanish author who would write a classical play free from national characteristics, and without it we may doubt that Martínez de la Rosa could have written his *Edipo*.

Standing quite apart from the *Quintanistas*, but worthy of mention before leaving the writers of tragedy, was Juan Francisco del Plano, a fecund author and lawyer of Saragossa. In his *Ensayo sobre la mejoría de nuestro teatro* (1798), he showed himself to be an out-and-out opponent of classicism and inveighed against the growing tendency to imitate the classics, declaring that the rules of Aristotle were inadmissible by that time and that the unities not only were not observed by the Greeks, but were laid aside in favor of other beauties. He offered a return to the drama of Lope de Vega and Calderón as a panacea for the theatrical ills of the day. None of his dramas achieved any degree of permanent success and *Gambela y Suni-Ada* (1799), a truly detestable piece, was severely hissed when offered in Madrid in 1800.

The writers of tragedy in Spain were markedly fewer than those who wrote in a comic vein, and the original comedies produced during this period far outnumber the original tragedies. Most of the tragic pieces played on the Spanish stage of the pre-Romantic years were translations from the drama of England, Germany, Italy and France. The Spanish dramatic genius did not adapt itself readily to classic tragedy, nor, for that matter, to tragedy non-classic. During this period as in the *siglo de oro* (the comparison does not go beyond a detail), it found its best expression in drama of a less sombre nature. Furthermore, besides the competition for public favor offered by comedy, this genre had to compete with the lyric opera, which had become exceedingly popular by this time.

In addition to the writers already mentioned and who were more or less well known in their day, there were others of little or no fame. It is to them that we owe whatever else of native tragedy is to be found in the theater of the first quarter of the century, if we except the contributions of those few who were to flourish and gain their fame in a later period, among whom may be mentioned without comment the Duque de Rivas and Gil y Zárate.

[4] Gaspar Bono Serrano, *B. A. E.*, LXVII, 619.

III

The writers of neo-classic comedy were called *Moratinistas*. Among them were the most significant dramatists of the day, Gorostiza, Javier de Burgos, Martínez de la Rosa and Bretón de los Herreros. These and many lesser figures carried on the struggle for good taste against those fecund scribes of the late eighteenth century, Comella and Zavala, and their numerous followers in the national drama. Drawing much encouragement from the success of Moratín's *El sí de las niñas* in 1806, the *afrancesados* in the theater fought earnestly for over a quarter of a century to redeem the stage of their country. They did not succeed wholly, but they did set a higher standard in drama for both public and critics, their efforts becoming fruitless only with the sudden advent of Romanticism.

Comedy was more popular than was tragedy and its exponents were in far larger numbers, though few dramatists stuck exclusively to one genre. Most of the writers of tragic plays who have already been mentioned were authors of comic pieces also; but the first important figure in neo-classic comedy in Spain was Leandro Fernández de Moratín, who, after seeing several of his plays succumb to the bad taste and ridicule of the day, finally achieved the most significant triumph of the Gallo-classic group and gave his name to that type of play which was to be the aim and standard of the supporters of good taste during pre-Romanticism.

Among the very first comedies to appear in the nineteenth century were six original pieces by María Rosa Gálvez, who was better known, however, for her tragedies. Also among the earliest was a solitary play by an author whose name still remains in deepest obscurity, *El chismoso*, by Francisco Meseguer. It is an early and good example of that type which, within a few years, was to be known in Spain as the *comedia casera*. Meseguer was in practice one of the earliest disciples of Moratín.

Two comedies bearing a publisher's date of 1800 were written by José Mor de Fuentes, one of the most interesting men of his day and whose name was celebrated in the press of his country for half a century.[5] Better known in other branches of literature, he contributed besides the two referred to above (*El calavera* and *El egoísta*) several other pieces to the Spanish stage. Although a disciple of good taste, Mor de Fuentes belonged definitely to no school.

A relatively outstanding figure in the literature of his time was Eugenio de Tapia, a man of varied interests and great efforts who was highly esteemed by his contemporaries. Though he claimed recognition as novelist, poet and dramatist, his forte was history and jurisprudence. To his country's theater he gave some dozen plays, only half of which were original. These were of little literary worth. *La Acelina* (1800) may be cited as representative. It has no redeeming qualities; it is melodrama rank and sheer, suggesting "Monk" Lewis at his feeblest.

The undisputed leader of the *Moratinistas* after Moratín himself was Manuel Eduardo Gorostiza, whose advent in the theater came some years after this group had been left without a head. His rather extensive travels and his literary experience in London combined with native ability to place him above most of his contemporaries. He stands as the most important figure in the Spanish pre-Romantic period after Moratín and before Bretón de los Herreros. He possessed a genuine comic talent and has been described as a rival of the author of *El sí de las niñas*, to whose style his own has been likened. A second-rate poet, he is to be compared neither with his

[5] Azorín declares that Mor de Fuentes deserves "más que cuatro desabridas líneas en nuestros compendios de historia literaria" (*Lecturas españolas*, Madrid, 1920, p. 130).

predecessor nor with Bretón. Menéndez y Pelayo says that within his sphere and school he stands, with respect to Moratín, at the same distance that Regnard does with respect to Molière.[6]

Of the twenty-three dramatic works ascribed to Gorostiza, only five are known of a certainty to be original, *Indulgencia para todos* (1818), *Las costumbres de antaño* (1819), *Tal para cual* (1820), *Don Dieguito* (1820) and *Contigo pan y cebolla* (1833). Six other comedies may be original.[7] Besides these, he adapted to the stage of his day Calderón's *Bien vengas mal si vienes solo* and Rojas' *Lo que son mujeres*, Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*, and at least nine plays from the French. The first of the comedies mentioned above, *Indulgencia para todos*, has often been regarded as his best. In addition to being written in strictest conformity to classic requirements, it is characterized by lightness of action and grace, and animation of dialogue. His other comedies are marked by substantially the same qualities. *Contigo pan y cebolla* has been critized by Menéndez y Pelayo as being among his weakest plays, because the author could never master that perfection of style necessary to prose if it is to be accepted on the stage of Spain.[8]

Rivalling, if not surpassing, Gorostiza in the quality of his plays was Francisco Javier de Burgos, whose chief claim to literary fame, however, is his translations from Horace.[9] An intimate fondness for the poets of Greece and Rome determined Burgos' taste in drama and caused him to side with the neo-classicists. On the other hand, he did not allow himself to be blinded to the beauties of non-classical literature; he knew and admired the masterpieces of his glorious predecessors in Spain. Though he was himself an ardent supporter of the unities, he protested against the too rigorous restriction of genius. His own belief held that movement and warmth of action, richness of meter, and natural language were not incompatible with these unities. What Javier de Burgos attempted to do in his own plays was to amalgamate the inspiration and elegance of Lope and Calderón with the rigidity of classicism. He believed that the poets of the *siglo de oro* by the union of these qualities could have risen to more splendid heights.

Such a union was in fact the one real solution to the dramatic difficulties of pre-Romanticism. Moratín realized it to a degree in his *El sí de las niñas;* Gorostiza achieved it to a lesser degree in *Lo que son mujeres* and *También hay secreto en mujer.* But it was not preached or held as a doctrine by enough men of talent to have any considerable effect on the decadent drama. Most dramatists were either purely national or wholly classic in their attempts, the ones refusing to see virtue in the theories of the others. Javier de Burgos' *Los tres iguales* (1818)[10] was a conscious and not unsuccessful effort to harmonize the qualities of both. The argument of the play is that of Calderón's *Cuantas veo tantas quiero* and Solís' *El amor al uso.*[11] The

[6] Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de la poesía hispano-americana*, Madrid, 1911, I, 120.

[7] *Una noche de alarma en Madrid, El amante jorobado, Las cuatro guirnaldas, El novio austro-ruso, Don Bonifacio, Virtud y patriotismo. La posadilla* is a reworking of *Las costumbres de antaño.*

[8] *Loc. cit.*

[9] Menéndez y Pelayo speaks of Javier de Burgos' versions of Horace as the equal or superior of any foreign translations and as perfect as the originals in style, language and metrical form (*Horacio en España*, Madrid, 1885, p. 149).

[10] Not played until 1827. His earlier plays were lost.

[11] Early in the year 1818 a discussion arose among a group of writers over the following question: "¿Sería posible escribir comedias en que, sin faltar a las reglas del

author asserts that he did not strive to eclipse these lights of the Golden Age, but wished to point out to the youth of his own day the road opened by Spain's great dramatists, and to indicate the precautions that good taste advised to those who would follow their steps.

In his next piece, *El baile de máscaras* (1832), Javier de Burgos continued what he had begun in his earlier one, to which it is somewhat inferior in several respects. Nevertheless, so well did he realize his purpose that the play has all the atmosphere of a comedy of the *siglo de oro*. The degree to which Burgos has combined in these two plays the virtues of the old Spanish theater with those of the neo-classic is remarkable. In this he succeeded more than any other, except perhaps Bretón de los Herreros. *Los tres iguales* and *El baile de máscaras* are among the most satisfying plays of the period.

Among the *Moratinistas* should be mentioned the names of two writers who attained their lasting fame in a subsequent period. The first of these is Francisco Martínez de la Rosa, who wrote several comedies in support of good taste. His earliest dramatic work was a two-act comedy, *El egoísta o lo que puede un empleo* (1812), written in the short space of a week. This was followed in 1821 by *La niña en la casa y la madre en la máscara*, a social-domestic play which possesses many of the author's best qualities. Not until he had introduced the Spanish theater to Romanticism did Martínez de la Rosa return to the *comedia moratiniana*, once in 1833 with *Los celos infundados o el marido en la chimenea*, and again in 1839 with *La boda y el duelo*. All of these plays were domestic comedies done in the manner of Moratín. That he achieved less than his master was due to a difference in genius for the type of plays he wrote.

When Gorostiza withdrew from Spain in 1823, the *Moratinistas* remained without a leader. Had Martínez de la Rosa been in the country during the years that followed he would doubtless have been their chief. In October of 1824 the recognition and applause accorded a play bearing the title *A la vejez viruelas* [12] passed the leadership of this group to a new and unknown author, Bretón de los Herreros. The success of this first play, which was modeled on *El sí de las niñas*, so encouraged Bretón that he gave himself up avidly to the making of plays of all kinds. During the years before Romanticism, translations constituted the bulk of his dramatic work. His original comedies were relatively few, and only part of these belong to the *comedia moratiniana*. In fact, his claim to the brief leadership he held in the Moratín group rests chiefly upon three pieces, *A la vejez viruelas*, *Los dos sobrinos o la escuela de los parientes* (1825), and *A Madrid me vuelvo* (1828). His increasing popularity became fixed with the last of these three. Bretón wrote several other comedies during this period, but none were so marked by the characteristics of the *comedia casera* as those mentioned. With *Marcela o ¿cuál de los tres?* (1832), he achieved his greatest triumph and cast off the shackles of classicism, giving independence to his own genius and blazing with one stroke the path of his future greatness.

It only remains to mention a few of the more important lesser figures of neo-classic comedy. Many writers in that day were outstanding because of the frequency

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arte, se diese a la acción y al lenguaje el movimiento y el calor que se nota en las producciones de nuestro teatro antiguo?" Javier de Burgos sustained that it was "posible hacer comedias en que se reuniesen las condiciones indicadas," and to prove his contention he wrote *Los tres iguales* (cf. *Advertencia* to *Los tres iguales*, Madrid, 1828).

[12] Written in 1817.

with which new works came from their pens, and quality was often far from being a determining factor. Vicente Rodríguez de Arellano was a fecund playwright of the turn of the century who came to be a semi-classicist toward the end of his life (he died sometime after 1806). He was a fair poet, and a good translator, but a poor dramatist. *La fulgencia o los dos maniáticos* (1801) is representative of him. It is mediocre, but yet not uninteresting; characterization satisfies, but the author was unable to harmonize the characters with the action.

Better known as translators than as original dramatists were Félix Enciso Castrillón and José María Carnerero. Their minds were inspired by every likely theme and their plays range from simple *loas* to tragedy, including every type of comedy. The former was the exponent of the *comedia de costumbres* during the first quarter of the century. Both were playwrights of little worth. The support they gave to the struggle for the supremacy of good taste may be counted as their service to the theater.

José Vicente Alonso was a member of a group of writers whose intellectual center was Granada and whose chief representative was Javier de Burgos, if Martínez de la Rosa be not included. He translated from the English, Dutch and French, and wrote three comedies himself. Juan José Aparicio was the author of two patriotic comedies, the themes of which were taken from the Napoleonic invasion. The Marqués de Casa-Cajigal translated from the French and Italian, and was the author of several original pieces. Manuel Bravo, Juan Luis Estremera, José Maqueda, Antonio Marqués y Espejo, Tadeo Moreno González García, María Lorenzo de los Ríos, and Antonio Valladares each gave several comedies to the stage of Spain. But none, with one or two exceptions, devoted much time or energy to dramatic composition; nearly all were writers whose plays were only incidentals in a life of regular duties.

Numerous, too, were the writers of this period who are represented in the pre-Romantic theater by a single comedy. They were men who were better known by their activities in various offices and capacities other than dramatic, and as writers they enjoyed renown in subjects ranging from jurisprudence to science, theology and philosophy.

No mention has yet been made of the contribution of the so-called Sevillian school to comedy. This "school" received a fresh impulse in 1793 from the establishment of the *Academia de Letras Humanas*. To this gathering belonged some of the most famous names of the time, representing men who early began to recover from the decadence that was afflicting Spain: Blanco White, José María Roldán, José Manuel Arjona, Alberto Lista, Félix José Reinoso, Cayetano María de Huarte, Cristóbal de Beña, Justino Matute y Gaviria, Manuel María del Mármol, Juan Bautista Arriaza, and José Marchena. All were poets and many of them superior. What excellence they possessed was partially due to their sincere attempt to revive the glories of their illustrious antecedents of the *siglo de oro*, Herrera and Rioja. The role they played in the drama of this time was, however, so small as to make their influence in this genre almost negligible. Of them all only five have any dramatic composition whatsoever to their credit, and the most of this consists of translations. The Sevillians were interested in poetry at its best rather than as a vehicle for dramatic plots or action.

IV

If there was any one phase of the dramatic movement of the pre-Romantic period that left a lasting impression upon Spanish drama it was, beyond a doubt, that of translation. The circumstances of the time considered, from neither the national school nor the neo-classic could the theater have gone forward to new life and restora-

tion. A drama coming from a fusion of the two was nowhere in sight as the period drew to a close, for the writers of Spain, with rare exceptions, had not yet learned to unite the qualities of both. Spanish drama found its escape through different channels, Romanticism, the *comedia de costumbres*, and the *pièce à thèse* as later espoused by Tamayo y Baus. Yet it was not the national or the neo-classic drama that had prepared the theater for Romanticism or the thesis play, and the costumbrista comedy would very likely have come with Bretón had the two schools never existed. More important as a cause contributory to the regeneration of the Spanish theater was a third phase of the pre-Romantic drama—translation. As a movement in this epoch it can hardly be identified; but it can be observed as a fairly distinct phase of the whole. Translation had its leaders and its minor exponents, among them men whose output was really prodigious. Through translation the theater of the Peninsula kept its contact with, and drew new life from, the theaters of the rest of Europe.

Dramatic translations had found more or less favor from the earliest years of their appearance in Spain. They may be said properly to have begun with the Marqués de San Juan's rendition of Corneille's *Cinna* in 1713. This was shortly followed by Cañizares's translation of the *Iphigénie* of Racine. From now on the theaters of Europe poured their plays upon the boards of Spain, until by the end of the century France, Italy, England, and Germany were supplying much of the repertory of the Spanish playhouses.

The pre-Romantic years showed a still keener interest in foreign drama, an interest that lapsed only during the years of the Peninsular War, and produced several figures who stand out preeminently as translators: Vicente Rodríguez de Arellano, Dionisio Solís, José María Carnerero, Félix Enciso Castrillón. These men made translations by the dozens. To theirs may be added literally scores of other names, including that of almost every dramatist of the first thirty years of the century. The theater of this time was very active, original plays were not in sufficient number to supply the demand, and translations appeared daily, being made, says Mesonero Romanos, with good taste in selection and care in the rendition. He mentions Enciso, Solís and Carnerero as the outstanding translators.[13] Larra, not so enthusiastic over the quality of the work in general, mentions Moratín, Marchena, Gorostiza, Ventura de la Vega and Bretón de los Herreros as the best of the translators.[14]

The most fertile and the most attractive field for the translators of Spain was the drama of France, and upon it they drew most heavily. Literally hundreds of French plays were done into Spanish, and more than once a same piece was translated by different scribes. It would require much space even to name all the authors whose plays were adapted for the stage of Spain. The great dramatists of French classicism, Corneille Racine, Molière, vied for popularity with Crébillon, Voltaire, Marivaux, Destouches, Picard, Duval, Regnard, Scribe, and with many lesser figures. The French vaudeville was an inexhaustible source. Contemporary authors were drawn upon with great frequency and often without discrimination; any French play that fell into the hands of the translators was likely material for rendition into Spanish.

The favorite Italian authors were Alfieri, Metastasio, and Goldoni. Shakespeare supplied most of the plays from the English theater, and almost always they were drawn indirectly, through the French of Ducis. In Germany Schiller, Lessing, and Kotzebue were the preferred authors for the drama-seeking Spaniard.

What translation meant to the Spanish stage was new ideas, new form, new

[13] *Trabajos no coleccionados*, Madrid, 1905, II, 417–18.

[14] *Obras*, 5a ed., Paris, 1885, II, 87.

methods and, ultimately, new life. This rubbing of elbows with other theaters helped finally to open for the home stage the way of future progress. It brought to the creative mind in Spain new conceptions of drama and its technique; it brought the people into contact with a new and different life. It helped not only to revive the Spanish drama, but made Spain a neighbor to the other countries of Europe.

V

As has already been said, the pre-Romantic period was in Spanish literature a continuation of that decadence which had begun with the end of the Golden Age, and was distinguished from the rest of it by an increased prevalence of translation and by the rise of neo-classicism to its apogee. The neo-classic tendency was the chief phase of the native drama of the first thirty years of the century. At first it struggled unequally with traditionalism; but by the middle of the period it came (helped greatly by translation) to be the dominating movement in drama. Its rise in popularity was due chiefly to the superiority of its exponents and to their mingling of Spanish elements with the classical formalities. On the whole, however, the drama of the entire period was inferior, and even its high spots (Moratín, Gorostiza, Burgos), though above mediocrity, are yet below first rank.

Yet, decadence is seldom without its great. Art had already produced Goya, and even the theater of this period was not wanting in a genius. He was not found among the scribes, however, but among the actors, and his name was Isidoro Máiquez, the one great light in the darkness of this theatrical night. By his superior acting he gave life and merit to many a sterile play of his time, though even he, says a critic, had his "ribetes de traducido . . . de Talma, su émulo."[15] But Máiquez was as great or greater than Talma and yielded to him in nothing pertaining to his art. He is a surprising phenomenon in the theater of his time.

The most that can be said of the drama of pre-Romanticism is that it represents the culmination of a noble effort to rise above the debased state in which it had wallowed for so many years. That it succeeded in this to some degree cannot be denied, for the plays of Moratín and Gorostiza are decidedly above those of, say, Comella and Zavala. To be sure, they fall short of greatness; but they are better than the dramas they strove to offset. Yet the chief accomplishment of this period was that it showed beyond cavil that the classic play was not for Spaniards, either in composition or in its full appreciation. Even in pieces built under the requirements, the most success was had, as has been stated, when the Spanish elements were brought to the fore. Intrinsically the drama of the pre-Romantic period has little literary worth and, as a whole, compares unfavorably with that of other flourishing periods. With it Spain's long decadence was brought to a close.

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[15] José Yxart, *El arte escénico en España*, Barcelona, 1894–96, I, 15.